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Identical letters dated 18 November 1996 from the Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to convey to you the attached message in which the Government of Burundi, through the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, confirms its willingness to make a contribution in a number of areas, including authorizing the use of the Bujumbura international airport, in the context of the need for humanitarian assistance stemming from the human tragedy in eastern Zaire. I had already announced Burundi's position on this matter on 14 November 1996 at the meeting of delegations accredited to the United Nations, which was co-chaired by the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff of Canada and by the Commander of the multinational force. On that occasion, I had noted that my Government, through the head of State, had already renewed its invitation to all Burundian refugees to return to their homeland in complete safety (see my letter of 1 November 1996). I had added that the Burundian Government might even consider the possibility of sending a special delegation to its nationals in Zaire to assure them as to their security both during their return journey and after their arrival in Burundi. I had specified, however, that this plan was being seriously jeopardized by the total economic embargo imposed against Burundi, and I had stressed the urgent need to lift this embargo to allow our country to participate in this important humanitarian operation in many ways, such as by making available the Bujumbura international airport, the hospitals and modern hotels of the capital, the social centres and other reception facilities, the road networks and, especially, hospital and medical personnel.

My Government would be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and the attached message from the Burundian Minister for Foreign Affairs circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 43, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Nsanze TERENCE
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

ANNEX

Identical letters dated 18 November 1996 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Burundi addressed to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to confirm the willingness of the Government of the Republic of Burundi to facilitate, insofar as possible, the implementation of Security Council resolution 1080 (1996) of 9 November 1996.

This willingness was expressed by the country's highest authorities, in particular when they again called on all Burundian refugees, especially those who had sought asylum in eastern Zaire, to return to Burundi. Backing up its words with action, the Government of Burundi has since assured the repatriation, in dignity and complete safety, of more than 33,000 refugees. It hereby reaffirms its desire to repatriate, under the same conditions, all the refugees who wish to return.

Having been requested, in particular by Canada, the United States of America and France, to make available certain facilities to help and assist the displaced persons, refugees and Zairian civilian populations in eastern Zaire, Burundi again expressed its concern at this humanitarian crisis. Moreover, it declared itself prepared to take any measures within its competence to facilitate the use of the Bujumbura international airport for this purpose.

The goodwill of my Government is being thwarted, however, by the air, lake and land embargo which a coalition of countries of the subregion has imposed against Burundi for the past three and a half months.

Furthermore, it would be inexcusable for the envisaged operation to take place without taking into account the grave humanitarian situation of the Burundian populations in the country's interior, a situation which should elicit the international community's concern just as strongly.

This position has been conveyed to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Raymond Chrétien, and to the States concerned. Consultations on the same subject are also being held with a number of leaders in the countries of the subregion.

In this context, the Burundian Government would be grateful if you would join it in its efforts to obtain the cooperation of the countries of the subregion so as to be able to give concrete expression to its willingness to help all the populations who are in need of humanitarian assistance in this geographical area.

(Signed) Luc RUKINGAMA
Minister for Foreign Affairs
and Cooperation